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## THE LADY OF THE HEAVENS.

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(Continued.)

Thereon the trembling child began, and after the native fashion, suppressing no detail or circumstance, however small, narrated how the Zulus had surprised her and Nole while they were gathering flowers, and having bound their arms, had caused them to be hurried away unseen to some dense bush about four miles off. Here they had been kept hidden till in the night the embassy returned. Then they had spoken with Nole, who in the end called her and gave her a message. This was the message: "Say to the Inkosazana that the Zulus have caught me, and are taking me to Dingaan the King. Say they declare that if she is pleased to come and speak the word, I shall be set free unharmed, that is, if she comes at once. But if she does not come, then I shall be killed. Say to her that I do not ask that she should come who am ready to die, and that though I believe that no harm will happen to her in Zululand, I think that she had better come. Say that, living or dead, I love her."

Then the maid described how the embassy went on with Nole, leaving her in the charge of the man Tambosha, who at the first break of dawn brought her back to Ramah, and made her hide in the bush.

Now Rachel had no more doubts. Clear and true as the truth, the question was—what must be done? She thought a while, then bade Tambosha and the child to follow her to the mission house. On the way she found her father and mother sitting in the sun, and drinking coffee after the South African fashion.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Dove, looking at the man anxiously. Rachel ordered him to repeat his story, and this he did, addressing Rachel alone. For of her father and mother he would not speak. When he had done the child told her tale also.

"Go now, and wait without," said Rachel, when it was finished. "Inkosazana, I go," answered the man, "but if it pleases you to save your servant, know that you must wait swiftly. If you wait, the Tugela by sunset this night, word will be passed to the King, and she dies at once. Know also that you must come alone with me, for my white or black, accompany you, they will be killed."

"Now," said Rachel, when the three of them were left alone, "now what is to be done?"

Mrs. Dove shook her head helplessly, and looked at her husband, who broke into a smile against the wall, their superstitious, cruel customs, and everything that was theirs, and ended by declaring that it was of course utterly impossible that Rachel should go upon such a journey, and thus place herself in the power of savages.

"But, father," she said when he had done, "do you think that you are pronouncing Nole's death sentence? If you were in my place, would you not go?"

"Of course I would. In fact I propose to do so as it is. No doubt Dingaan will listen to me."

"You mean that Dingaan will kill you?" "Did you not hear what Mr. Tambosha said? Father, you must not go."

"No, John," broke in Mrs. Dove, "Rachel is right. You must not go, for you would never come back again. Also, how can you be so cruel as to think of leaving me here alone?"

"Then I suppose that we must abandon that poor girl to her fate," exclaimed Mr. Dove.

"How can you suppose anything so merciless, father, when it is in my power to save her?" asked Rachel. "If I let those horrible Zulus kill her I shall never be happy again all my life."

"And what if the horrible Zulus kill you?" "They will not kill me, father: mother knows they will not and so do I. But as they have got me into their hands, I am sure that if I do not go they will send an impi here to kill everybody else, and take me prisoner. The kidnappers of Nole is only a first move. It is one of two things: either I must visit Zululand, save Nole, and play my part there as best I can, or we must desert Nole, and all leave this place at once, tomorrow if possible. But then, as I told you, I shall never forgive myself, especially as I am not in the least afraid of the Zulus."

"It is true that God can protect you as much in Zululand as He can here," replied Mr. Dove, beginning to weaken in face of this desperate resolve.

"Of course, father, but if I go to Zululand I want you and mother to trek to Durban and remain there till I return."

"Why, Rachel? It is absurd." "Because I do not think that you are safe here and it is not at all absurd," she answered, "that I am in some way in bondage to you; you remember all their talk about the heavens and the clouds. Of course, they may mean nothing, but you will be much better in Durban for a while, where you can take to the water if necessary."

Now Mr. Dove's obstinacy asserted itself. He refused to entertain any such idea, giving reason after reason why he should not do so. Thus for another half hour the argument raged till at length, a compromise was arrived at, as usual in such cases, not of total satisfaction on either side. Rachel was to be allowed to undertake her mission on behalf of Nole, and her parents were to remain at Ramah. On her return, which they hoped would be within a few days, the question of the abandonment of the mission was to be settled by the help of the experience she had gained. To this arrangement, then, they reluctantly enough all of them, in order to save Nole's life, and for no other reason.

The momentous decision once taken, in half an hour Rachel was ready for her journey, which she determined she would make upon her own horse, a grey mare that she had ridden for a long while, and could rely on in every way. The white riding ox that Dingaan had sent as a present was also to accompany her, to carry her spare garments and other articles packed in skin bags, such as coffee, sugar and a few medicines, and to serve as a remount in case anything should happen to the horse. When it was laden Rachel sent for the Zulu, Tambosha, and pointing to the ox, said:

"I come to visit Dingaan the king, and to claim my servant. Lead the beast on, I will overtake you presently."

The man saluted and began to boggle, that is to give her titles of praise, but she cut him short with a wave of her hand, and he departed leading the ox.

Now while Mr. Dove saw to the saddling of the horses, for he was to ride with her as far as the Tugela, Rachel went to bid farewell to her mother. She found her by herself in the sitting room, seated at an open window, and looking out sadly towards the sea.

"I am quite ready, dear," she said in a cheerful voice. "Don't look so sad; I shall be back again in a week with Nole."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Dove, "I think that you and Nole will come back safely, but—" and she paused.

"But what, mother?" "Oh! I don't know. I am very much oppressed, my heart is heavy in me. I hate parting with you, Rachel. Remember we have never been separated since you were born."

Her daughter looked at her, and was filled with grief and compunction. "Mother," she said, "if you feel like that—well, I love Nole, but after all you are more to me than Nole, and if you wish I will give up this business and stop with you. It is very terrible, but I can't help it. I will understand, poor thing," and her eyes filled with tears at the thought of the girl's dreadful fate.

"No, Rachel, somehow I think it best that you should go, not only for Nole's sake, but for your own. If your father would leave today or tomorrow, as you suggested, it might be otherwise, but he won't do that, so it is no use talking of it. Let us hope for the best."

"As you wish, mother."

"Now, dear, kiss me and go. I hear your father calling you; and, Rachel, if we should not meet again in this world, I know you won't forget me, or that I shall be another day with you. I did not want to frighten you with my fancies, which come from my not being well. Good-bye, my love, good-bye! God be with you and make you happy, always—always."

Then Rachel kissed her in silence, for she could not trust herself to speak, and she went to the room whence her mother watched her, also in silence. In another minute she was mounted and, accompanied by the ox and the child, she started on which Tambosha had led the white ox.

Presently they overtook him, where he had stopped, and looking at Mr. Dove, said:

"Inkosazana, the King's orders are that none should accompany you into Zululand."

"Be silent," answered Rachel proudly. "He rides with me as far as the river bank."

Then they went on, and Rachel was relieved to find that whatever she had been her mother's mood, that of her father was fairly cheerful. Indeed, his mind was so occupied with the details and object of her journey that he quite forgot his dangers.

Two hours' steady riding brought them to the ford of the Tugela river, across which lay Zululand. On the hills, beyond it they could see a number of Kafirs watching, who on catching sight of Rachel, ran down to the river and entered it, swimming and beating the water with their sticks, as she guessed, to scare away any crocodiles that might be lurking there.

At the moment of separation, however, she turned back to her father, who had come, Mr. Dove, to part with his daughter, and again suggested to Tambosha that he should accompany her to Dingaan's Great Place.

"If you set a foot across that river, Praying Man," answered the induna grimly, "you shall die; look, there are the spears that will kill you."

As he spoke he pointed to the crest of the opposing hill over which, running swiftly in ordered companies, the Zulus were seen to be passing, carrying large white shields and wore white plumes rising from their head-rings.

"It is the escort of the Inkosazana," he added. "Do you think that she can take hurt among so many? And do you think, if you dare to disobey the word of the King, that you can escape so many? Go back now, lest they should come over and kill you where you are."

Then, seeing that both argument and menace were useless, and that Tambosha would brook no delay, Mr. Dove hurriedly embraced his daughter in farewell. Indeed, Rachel was glad that there was no time for her to part with her father, for she feared lest she should break down before the Zulus who were watching her, and be lowered in his eyes and in those of his people.

It was over and done. She had entered Zululand, riding her grey mare, while Tambosha led the white ox at her side. Presently she looked back, and saw her father kneeling in prayer upon the bank.

"What does the man?" asked Tambosha, uneasily. "Is he bewitching us?"

"Nay," she answered, "he prays to the Heavens for us."

On they went between the two lines of natives, who ceased their beating of the water, and were silent as she passed. The river was shallow, and they crossed it with ease. By now the regiment was gathered on its further bank, two thousand men or more, brought thither to do honor to the white girl in whom they chose to consider that the guardian spirit of their people was incarnate. Contemplating then Rachel wondered how it came about that they should be thus prepared for her advent. The answer rose in her mind. If she had refused to visit Zululand, their mission would have failed. It was wise, therefore, that she had come of her own will.

Forward she rode, a striking figure in her grey dress, white cloak, and her bright hair hung, sitting very proud and upright on her horse, without a sign of doubt or fear. As she approached the captains of the regiment ran forward to meet her with lifted shields and crouching bodies.

"Hail!" cried their leader. "In the name of the Great Elephant, of Dingaan the King, hail to the Lady of the Heavens, Holder of the Spirit of Nombukubwana."

Rachel rode on, taking no notice, marvelling when Nombukubwana, whose spirit she was supposed to enshrine, might be. Afterwards she discovered that it was only another name for the Zulu word for Zulu, the word which white folk believed by this people to control their destinies, with whom it had pleased them to identify her. As her horse left the wide river and set foot upon dry land, every man of the two thousand soldiers who were watching, as it seemed to her, with wonder and awe, began to beat his oxhide shield with the handle of his spear. They beat very softly at first, producing a sound like the distant murmur of the sea, then harder and harder, till its volume grew to a mighty roar, impossible to describe, a sound like the sound of thunder that echoed along the sea and from hill to hill. The mighty noise sank and died away as it had begun, and for a moment there was silence. Then at some signal, a cry flashed aloft in the sunlight, and from every throat came the royal salute—Bayete. It was a tremendous and most inspiring welcome, so tremendous that Rachel could no longer doubt that this people regarded her as a being apart, and above the other white folk whom they knew.

At the time, however, she had little space for such thoughts, since the mare she rode, terrified by the tumult, bucked and shied so violently that she could scarcely keep her seat. She was a good rider, which was fortunate for her, since, had she been ignominiously thrown upon such an occasion, her prestige must have suffered, if indeed it were not destroyed. As it proved, it was greatly enhanced by this accident. Many of the Zulus of the day had never even seen a horse, which was considered by all of them to be a dangerous if not a magical beast. That a woman should remain seated on such a wild animal when it sprang into the air, and swerved from side to side, struck them, therefore, as something



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marvellous and out of experience, a proof indeed that she was not as others are.

She quitted the mare, and rode on between the white-shielded ranks, who their greeting finished, remained absolutely still like bronze statues watching her with wondering eyes. When at length they were passed, the captains and a guard of about fifty men ran ahead of her. Then she came, and after her Tambosha, leading the white ox, followed by another guard, which in turn was followed by the entire regiment. Thus royally escorted, asking no questions, and speaking no word, did Rachel make her entry into Zululand. Only in her heart she wondered whether she was going, and how that strange journey would end, wondered, too, how it would fare with her father and her mother till she returned to them.

Well might she wonder. When she had ridden thus for about five hours an incident occurred which showed her how great, and indeed how dreadful was the eminence on which she had been set among these people. Suddenly some cattle, frightened by the approach of the impi, rushed through it towards their kraal, and a bull that was with them, seeing this unaccustomed apparition of a white woman mounted on a strange animal, put down its head and charged her furiously. She saw it coming, and by pulling the mare on to its haunches avoided its rush. Now at the time she was riding on a path which ran along the edge of a little rock-strewn donga, more than eight or ten feet up, but steep-sided. In to this donga the bull, which had shut its eyes to charge after the fashion of its kind, plunged headlong, and as it chanced struck its horns against a stone, twisting and dislocating the neck, so that it lay there still and dead.

When she saw what had happened she uttered a long-drawn O—w of amazement, for had not the beast dared to attack the White Spirit, and had not the Spirit rewarded it with instant death? Then a captain made a motion with his hand and instantly men sprang upon the remaining cattle, four or five of them that were following the bull, and despatched them with assegais. Before Rachel could interfere they were pierced with a hundred wounds. Now there was a little pause, while the carcasses of the beasts were dragged out of her path, and the blood-stains covered from her eyes with fresh earth. Just as this was finished there appeared, scrambling up the donga, and followed by some men, a fat and hideous-looking woman, with fish bladders in her hair, and snake-skins about her waist. From her costume, Rachel knew at once must be an Isanuzi or witch-doctor. Evidently she was in a fury, as might be seen by the workings of her face, and the extraordinary swiftness with which she moved notwithstanding her years and bulk. "Who has dared to kill my cattle?" she screamed. "Is it thou whom men name Nombukubwana?"

"Woman," answered Rachel quietly, "the Heavens killed the bull which would have hurt me. For the rest, ask of the captains of the King."

The witch-doctor glanced at the dead bull which lay in the donga, its head twisted up in an unnatural fashion at right angles to the body, and for a moment seemed afraid. Then red rage at the loss of her herd broke over her, and she was a person in authority, one accustomed to be feared because of her black arts and her office.

"When the Inkosazana is seen in Zululand," she gasped, "death walks with her. There is the token of it, and she points to the dead cattle. 'So it has ever been and so shall it ever be. Red is thy road through life, White One. Go back, go back now to thine own kraal, and see whether thy words are true.' And springing at the horse she seized it by the bridle as though she would drag it round."

Now in her hand Rachel held a little rod of white rhinoceros horn, which she used as a riding whip, and with this rod she pointed at the woman, meaning that some of those with her should cause her to loose the bridle. Too late she remembered that in this salvage land such a motion when made by the King or one in supreme command, had another and more dreadful interpretation—death without pity or reprieve.

In an instant, before she could interfere, before she could speak, the witch-doctor lay dead upon the carcass of the dead bull.

"What of the others, Queen, what of the others?" asked the chief of the Isanuzis, bending low before her, and pointing with his spear to the attendants of the witch-doctor, who fled agast. "Do they join this evil-doer who dared to lift her hand against thee?"

"Nay," she answered in a low voice, for horror had made her almost dumb. "I give thee life, Forward."

"She gives thee life!" shouted the Isanuzis about her. "The Bearer of life and death gives life to the Isanuzis, and the Isanuzis give life to the Isanuzis. When the Isanuzi, a witch of repute, had lifted voice and hand against her, she had commanded her death, showing that she feared no rival magic. True the woman would have been killed in any case, for such was the order of the King as to all who should dare to affront the Inkosazana, yet the captains had waited to see what Rachel would do that they might judge her accordingly. If she had shown fear, if she had even neglected to avenge, they might have marvelled whether after all she were more than a beautiful white maiden filled with the wisdom of the whites."

Now they knew better; she was a Spirit having the power of a Spirit over beast and man, who smote as a Spirit should. The fame of it went throughout the land, and little chance thereafter had Rachel of escaping from the shadow of her own fearful renown.

(To be Continued.)

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